

To:

Commission on Marriage Canon
Anglican Church of Canada
80 Hayden Street
Toronto, ON M4Y 3G2

From:

Douglas Mitchell
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Victoria, B. C.

Monday, September 29th, 2014

Dear Members of the Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and comments regarding potential changes to Canon XXI. As a parishioner of the *Church of St. John the Divine* in Victoria, BC, I voted at a Special Vestry Meeting yesterday in support of the submission by my church to your Commission. I have included below an additional response of my own to the third question regarding a difference between civil and Christian marriage, and my own comments on how I see a possible way forward.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Mitchell

Is there a difference between civil and Christian marriage?

I see marriage as a unique, precious and committed, mutually supportive relationship or state in which, by choice, two people are joined together in a social, legal, loving and hopefully long-lasting interdependence. Marriage as a social and legal 'institution' originated under the jurisdiction of civil law. The Christian Church eventually picked up on the issue and wrapped marriage in theological/sacramental robes. That same church also interpreted a wife to be part of the property accruing to a husband in a marriage, and required a commitment from the wife to obey and serve the husband! Fortunately we have moved forward from such a patriarchal Christian view of marriage, a view which could hardly have been inspired by God. In more recent times, the civil law of Canada has removed gender discrimination in marriage. The Anglican Church of Canada has resisted such a change, but the rationale for such resistance has become as outdated as considering wives to be accrual property and requiring them to obey their husbands. In Canada today we profess, at least in law, to be an inclusive country where all are equal. Yet in the eyes of most Canadians, it is civil marriage, not Christian marriage, which represents inclusivity and equality.

A Possible Way Forward

I am proud to be a member of a congregation that loudly and enthusiastically professes every Sunday “*We celebrate Christ by including everyone!*” That inclusivity means that gender and sexual orientation have no bearing on individuals or couples being equally welcome at our worship, in the receiving of sacraments, and in active participation in liturgical roles at our services. However, that inclusivity sadly extends only as far as permitted by the Canons of the Anglican Church of Canada which currently preclude marriage in the church of other than heterosexual couples. To deny same-gender couples marriage within the church strongly indicates that we do not agree with same-gender marriage. Yet we are so willing to otherwise fully accept them, once married elsewhere! This is hypocritical at best, and smacks of an earlier era when we would gladly accept divorced couples remarried elsewhere, but wouldn't marry them in our church! We finally saw the light in that regard. If, in our daily lives, we Christians are to reflect the inclusivity and love for all that Jesus exemplified, I think we're beyond the point where we can continue using church laws of our forefathers' creation to justify excluding same-gender couples from marriage within the Anglican Church of Canada.

Inclusion of a ‘conscience’ clause in a revised Canon has been suggested as offering a means by which dissenting incumbents and parishes can avoid participating in same-gender church marriages if they do not agree with such a change. While this might be seen as an acceptable compromise, it would only represent a partial step towards inclusivity. A same-gender couple wishing to be married within the church would still be obliged to ‘go shopping’ for an Anglican parish and incumbent willing to marry them, thus perpetuating a degree of exclusivity within the Anglican Church of Canada. One possible way to more realistically broaden inclusivity throughout the church would be to discontinue *all* church weddings, offering in lieu and regardless of gender, the Blessing of civil marriages. Because parishes and incumbents in disagreement with the Blessing of same gender marriages could presumably still exercise their prerogative under a conscience clause, this would obviously not represent an ultimate solution. But it could represent a significant step towards the day when the Anglican Church of Canada can proudly claim inclusivity without reservation. And then we could look *every* parishioner in the eye, and without reservation or qualification, mean it when we say during the Eucharist “*the Peace of the Lord be always with you.*”

We have choices to make, and not easy choices. We can avoid rocking the boat and creating inevitable stress and division by maintaining our current exclusivity. Or, at the unavoidable risk of offending, even alienating many, we can choose a bold, courageous and initially painful step forward towards inclusivity for all. Our credibility as a loving community of faith is on the table. Our Lord will be watching.